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ABSTRACT

An exhibit, "Common Ground: The Heart of Community," tells the story of Japanese Americans in the United States as an example of a vibrant ethnic group that survived hard times and continue to stay together. The exhibit is housed in the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles (California). This paper describes and discusses this exhibit and installations at JANM. The paper suggests that the museum, and in particular its centerpiece, a reconstructed World War II army barracks called, "Moving Walls," offers a temporal and geographic space to redress the trauma of Japanese American internment and create a new cultural hybrid positioned as the intersecting locale of actions taking place in differing temporal periods. The barracks forge a post-traumatic transhistorical space operating as a critical technology in the (re)articulation and (re)production of a Japanese American national community. It argues that the JANM's "Common Ground" exhibit attempts to displace the blame of national racism from American society in an effort to create an opening for allegiance and integration to the nation based on the presence of the museum. It comments on two problems in contemporary U.S. society and how they are dealt with in material culture: (1) the imagining of a place within the United States where Asian Americans can reside; and (2) coping with the national trauma of the internment of Japanese Americans in collective memory. (Contains 12 notes and 13 works references.) (BT)

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Moving Walls across the *Common Ground* of the Japanese American National Museum: An Examination of a National Minority Museum's Strategy of Connecting American and Japanese Values

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Moving Walls across the *Common Ground* of the Japanese American National Museum: An Examination of a National Minority Museum's Strategy of Connecting American and Japanese Values

The Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in downtown Los Angeles contains the largest permanent exhibit within the United States created to "promote understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by preserving, interpreting and sharing the experiences of Japanese Americans" ("Mission of JANM").[1] Aptly titled *Common Ground: The Heart of Community*, the exhibit tells the story of Japanese Americans in the United States as an example of a vibrant ethnic group which has survived hard times but which continues to stay together.

[1] According to the web page and newsletters of the JANM, the *Common Ground* exhibit, "is a historical overview of the Japanese American community, from the days of the Issei (first generation Japanese American) pioneers to the present. The exhibition features artifacts and photos collected nationwide, representing Chicago, Denver, Hawai'i, Los Angeles, New York, San Diego, San Francisco, and other areas. Common Ground is about what ties a community together. It is a story that, in one way or another, all of us share." (Quoted from "Pavilion Galleries")

The exhibit opens with the placement of a photograph of a young Japanese American girl. Taken circa 1918 titled "A daughter of Japanese immigrants holds her country's flag," the image displays a young girl, between four and six years of age, covered in a corduroy coat with white fur trim on the cufflinks and collar. The coat has three oversized buttons, exaggerating even more her small size. Her head is crowned with a simple black bonnet. Her face bears the socially constructed marks of Asianness: round cheeks framing a small flat nose complimented with "unfolded" eyelids producing the "occidental look" sometimes spoken of as "slanted eyes."[2]. Her physical marks of race are not the only things that catch the viewer's attention when observing this image. In her lowered right hand she holds a small American flag, much like the type one would wave at a parade to show one's patriotism. Even though she clearly grasps the flag in her diminutive hand, she is not waving it and its lowered position

[2] The terms used in this description are not mine, but come from D. R. Millard's work on plastic surgery, "Oriental Peregrinations." Millard was a plastic surgeon with the U.S. Army who was sent to Korea to help reconstruct war-damaged bodies. Eventually, he began using cosmetic surgery at the request of Koreans to alter their facial makeup to "de-orientalize" them. Through placing extra cartilage in the nose and adding folds of skin to the eyelid, Millar perceived his work as furthering the production of a hybrid Asian subject who could enter integrate with American more easily. For more on Millard see Palumbo-Liu, 81-115.

creates a contrast between the upper and lower portions of the photograph.

The bottom portion of the image is marked by codes that should resonate American-ness with us. A flag typically used to show our admiration for our country, a symbol of our devotion which has been embodied with so much symbolic power that some weep at its display, others will risk bodily harm to make sure it is protected. The top half of the picture displays the racialized body of the Japanese girl, a body that has been historically grounded as a sign of Otherness in the American nation. At times this body, this face, looked so much like the "enemy" that it was stripped of its property and exiled to the interior of the country. At other times, this face was heralded as the "model" for other minorities to follow. This face, or ones "like" it has been called hard-working and rooted in traditional Asian values that ensured productivity for the American nation in education, industry, and science.

Symbolically and materially, it is the combination of these two meaning systems demonstrated in this photograph that produce the opening (or entrance) to the Japanese American National Museum. The image hails the possibility of a new subjectivity within the American nation: the (racially) Japanese that is

(culturally) American. The juxtaposition of the socially marked sign (the face) and symbol (the flag) begins the JANM's dream of racial purity that coincides with cultural hybridity and American patriotism.

Analyzing installations at the Japanese American National Museum, this paper suggests that the Museum, and in particular its centerpiece, a reconstructed World War II army barracks called *Moving Walls*, offers a temporal and geographic space to redress the trauma of Japanese American internment and create a new cultural hybrid. Positioned as the intersecting locale of actions *taking place* in differing temporal periods, the barracks forge a post-traumatic transhistorical space operating as a critical technology in the (re)articulation and (re)production of a Japanese American national community. In particular, I argue that the JANM's *Common Ground* exhibit attempts to displace the blame of national racism from American society in an effort to create an opening for allegiance and integration to the nation based on the presence of the Museum itself.

Therefore, this project seeks to comment on two problems in contemporary American society and how they are dealt with in material culture: the imagining of a place within America that

Asian Americans can reside in and coping with the national trauma of the internment of Japanese Americans in collective memory. Dealing with the inclusion of Asian Americans has proven difficult for the nation since the before the turn of the 20th century. The identity of Asians in America has vacillated quite a bit even within the last fifty years. Within the post- World War II era, different discourses have vilified Asians as the "Yellow Peril," marveled at the exoticism of the East in the form of Orientalism, tried to prevent access into the United States by denying naturalization and preventing immigration from Asian countries, and heralded the advent of a "model minority" best able to assimilate and succeed in modern America. The coincidence of these contradictory subjectivities displays an amazing anxiety regarding the role and function of Asians in America. Of course, these contradictions made themselves felt in more than just discursive terrains. The history of Asians in the United States is a history filled with different kinds of persecutions at both local and national levels.

For Americans of Japanese ancestry, it has been the evacuation and internment during World War II that punctuates the need to find a "place" within the United States. The dislocation of Japanese Americans from coastal zones and urban centers in 1942

makes clear that national space has to be preserved, protected, and valued. The trauma created in the evacuation and removal of Japanese Americans during the internment period persists within the Japanese American community. As the conclusion of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians notes in its report to the United States Congress, internment remains the "reference point" for Japanese Americans:

> 'Before evacuation.' 'After camp.' Words signifying the watershed in the history of Japanese Americans in the United States. Even after four decades, it is the mournful reference point from which these Americans describe changes in their communities, their personal lives, their aspirations. It is the central experience which has shaped the way they see themselves, how they see America, and how they have raised their children. (Miller 301)

These conclusions must be taken with a grain of salt. Despite the thousands of internment survivors interviewed in more than twenty United States cities, even a Congressionally appointed Commission can't ascertain the feelings of all Japanese Americans. But the establishment and findings of such a Commission the hearings of which eventually led to the 1988 Civil Rights Bill which paid reparations of $20,000 and delivered a Presidential

letter of apology to every internment survivor surely attests to the importance of internment in the national memory.

Further evidence of the need to deal with the effects of internment is provided by Gordon Nakagawa. In surveying the stories told about the internment period by Japanese Americans, he notes that:

> Evidence of the ongoing salience of the internment and its aftermath can be readily found: Throughout 1992, a nationwide, yearlong series of events commemorated the 50-year anniversary of FDR's signing of EO9066; camp reunions for former internees and their families are held yearly; annual pilgrimages to former camp sites are commonplace, attended by multigenerational contingents; the vernacular media regularly include articles, columns, and editorials that detail issues germane to the internment and its effects; and expanded coverage of the internment period and to its long-term consequences are priority items in the academic agenda of many Nikkei and non-Nikkei educators and researchers. (143)

To this list of places where commemoration of internment occurs we must add downtown Los Angeles' JANM. All of these events, pilgrimages to former camps sites, camp reunions, and continuing attention to the internment period, attest to the importance of place in coping with an event that removed people from their homes and placed them in exile. The JANM is one more location that tries to heal the wounds created over the trauma of the internment.

Moving Walls Described: The Army Barracks in Los Angeles

As museum visitors enter the JANM and observe the *Common Ground* exhibit they first encounter a reconstructed barracks that sits as the entrance to the *Common Ground* gallery. The barracks, moved in 1994 plank by plank from Heart Mountain Internment Camp in Wyoming to be reconstructed in the museum, form the first in a series of four galleries in *Common Ground.* Emphasizing the movement of the structure and the community it is titled *Moving Walls*. From the outside, visitors can see the tar-paper covered walls that remain broken from age and exposure to the elements. From the inside, visitors observe a room that is said to have housed a family of four, although it seems quite small. The interior of the barrack, except for the "family room" which is separated by the skeletal structure where a wall used to be, is lined with modern museum scaffolding depicting not life in the barracks at Heart Mountain, but the fundraising drive and physical labor volunteered to the museum in order to move the barracks from Wyoming to Los Angeles. The JANM visitor's pamphlet on the exhibit describes it by noting:

> The exhibition begins with the story of 40 men and women who traveled to Heart Mountain Wyoming—site of one of ten American

> concentration camps during World War II. The volunteers went to take apart a barracks still standing in the Wyoming countryside and get it ready to truck to Los Angeles. They discovered that the friendships they formed, the common experiences and hard work they shared, brought them together as a 'community of spirit.' The barracks on display is evidence of a national tragedy—a mistake that must never be repeated. It is also evidence of the spirit and continuing vigor of the Japanese American community. (*Common Ground*)

The commemoration of the relocation of the barracks displayed on the walls implies that a lot of care and dedication was taken to transport the once-temporary housing from its place of desert exile to a central location in the JANM in the heart of little Tokyo. Indeed, *Moving Walls* is the centerpiece of the exhibit. *Moving Walls* begins and ends the layout of the *Common Ground* exhibit which discusses the legacy of Japanese immigrants to America, beginning their history in the 1910s, then, literally, taking a sharp turn directly behind the barracks to exhibit World War II's internment and xenophobia, and, finally, ending with a discussion of the continuing bonds of Japanese Americans in America after redress.

This center, however, whose placement within the museum is conditioned on its ability to be an authentic residence of the

exiled internee, no longer looks much like a residence. Despite the fact that the barracks exists as a residence it looks as if no one has ever lived here. No ornamentation can be found anywhere inside or outside of the barracks. Surely, when this was a place of residence, it was adorned in order to make the building a home, if only for a short period of time. Both internment narratives and photographic archives testify to the decoration given to the temporary housing by internees.[3] There is no evidence of that in the reconstructed barracks though, not even a bed or a blanket. In addition to the lack of physical evidence of people inhabiting this space, there is also a lack of people. There are no wax figures which try to represent what an interned Japanese American would look like, but neither are there photographs of actual residents, stories reproduced about internment, nor even names of people who lived in Heart Mountain or this particular barrack.[4] The internees and all the traces of their

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[3] Several photographs from the War Relocation Authority archives testify to the common practice of decorating and transforming the walls of the Army barracks in order to make the relocation period more livable.

[4] None of these absences can be accounted for by gaps in historical knowledge because the museum displays each of this type of information in a separate place within the Pavilion Building. Numerous photographs as well as films are displayed in the Common Ground exhibit. Baseball as well as Kendo uniforms are propped on headless mannequins in other exhibits. Finally, the Camp Locators project undertaken in the Hirasaki Resource Center indexes each of the ten internment camps, including Heart Mountain, and contains information on residents from the 1940s as well as their present location and status.

living in this commemorated residence have been removed. *Moving Walls* exists without ornament and without comment on the conditions or inhabitants during the internment period. It is an empty center of the museum.

Given the varieties of audiences that observe this space every day, it is hard to ascertain exactly what the force of the exhibit is on museum visitors. For internment survivors, the emptiness of the space may allow it to resonate with them as personal. Because it does not contain features of any specific exilic home, it could be "mine." With that it is certain to arouse very painful memories of the loss of personal property and the shame attached to being labeled as a possible traitor.[5] For those who are not internment survivors, even not Japanese Americans, the barracks is likely to have a very different force. The absence and openness of *Moving Walls* may allow for more identification with ethnic others. Not only can non-ethnic patrons envision themselves as part of the interned, but the absence and loss of property which the barrack does a good of presenting (by excluding it) may prompt another mode of identification. Palumbo-Liu notes that the

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[5] These are some of the common responses of internment survivors given in the CWRIC's report, *Personal Justice Denied*. See also Amy Iwasaki Mass's "Psychological Effects of the Camps on Japanese Americans."

media representations of Korean Americans defending their personal property during the aftermath of the Rodney King decision in 1992 created a imaginary identification between non-ethnic viewers who could "sympathetically identify with particular property, and assume the role of one who had (likewise) acquired such property" (189). Of course internment is not the same as the 1992 riots. However, the absence of property may work in a similar way. The non-ethnic viewer, thus may identify with the internment by imagining what their life would be like if they had to give up their personal property. "The protection of private property creates a strong identificatory bond between both those who have it in abundance and those who may no" (Palumbo-Liu 189).

In addition to the modes of identification served through the absence of adornment, decoration, and personalization in *Moving Walls*, the absence of human "traces" also allows the site to float freely within the bounds of history that the museum narrates with regard to Americans of Japanese Ancestry. The barracks displayed in *Moving Walls* are the only space inside the museum which seek to be transhistorical. These barracks were present when Americans of Japanese ancestry were relocated to the desert. They stood alone during the time of resettlement. They

became a symbol during the redress and reparations movement. They bear witness to their own movement and *reclamation* in 1994 when the pictures that placed on it were taken. Finally, and most importantly given the progression of the museum's narrative, they currently stand in the present time of the museum visitor to represent the strength of the contemporary Japanese American community.

If *Moving Walls* is the center of the JANM and that center is materially emptied of all traces of residents residing there then it does not remain empty for long. Rather the barracks is involved in a complex relation with several other parts of the museum and although the domicile is presented as authentic and barren it is imaginatively "filled" with figures, objects, and voices from other parts of the museum and the museum's other exhibits. Once the museum patron continues their tour, having started with a barren barracks, the process of filling in begins. The barracks initially prompts the viewer to this role not only by showing its absence but by immediately presenting itself as a place where actions take place at multiple time periods. Despite the ethnic or non-ethnic status of the visitor three principal temporal formations have already been labeled: The internment period as evinced by the

historical captioning to anchor the exhibit, the 1994 *reclamation* project as presented through photographs and captions placed on the very walls of the barracks, and, finally, the present time of the visitor as they see the totally reconstructed structure before them within the JANM. Therefore, in the story of the Japanese American community told by the JANM, the Army barracks used in internment are a critical place for the Japanese American community, they represent its dislocation in the past as well as its triumph in the present. In order to better understand the construction of Japanese American-ness distributed by the exhibits in the JANM, I will examine some of the ways in which this center is imaginatively filled by persons and objects in three different time periods: the internment period, the post-redress period, and viewer's present.[6] If the barracks exist as a space integral to the

[6] I am intentionally not using dates within this discussion of the museum's periods because within the museum the flow of time is more structured by memory than chronology. The gallery entitled *Community in Wartime* for example takes up a large part of the remainder of *Common Ground* even though chronologically it only covers four years of time. However, *Re-visioning ourselves, Re-visioning America*, which chronicles the creation, rise, and success of the Asian movement in the United States, places all of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s events and movements, including Vietnam and the Asian American involvement there, into one gallery which is in fact smaller than *Community in Wartime*. I do not wish to argue that there is any form of history that is devoid of memory. In fact, within the era of national history, history and memory have become identical (Nora 626). However, within the JANM, chronological dates are divided into pre-internment, internment, post-internment/resettlement, and redress and reparations.

Japanese American community across several eras, then the filling in of people and objects creates a transhistorical Japanese American subject who is able to withstand national trauma and remain unblemished by it.[7] Within the relations established by the JANM's *Common Ground* exhibit, it is the ability to survive against an unforgiving environment that forges the mettle of the internment survivor. The museum, therefore, pays special attention to the persons placed inside the barracks and the conditions which they endured and overcame.

The Internment Period: Children and Dirt

Once the patron experiences the emptiness of *Moving Walls,* the thirst created by the lack of objects and people is slowly quenched with the remainder of the *Common Ground* series. Within a few feet of *Moving Walls* several everyday objects begin

[7] *Moving Walls* is an exhibit about the transhistorical character of a present hero. In that sense, it is truly mythical speech (see Barthes). Roland Barthes's critical essay "Myth Today" analyzes myth as politicized speech and semiological system. The intersection of ideology and semiology, mythology studies "ideas-in-form" (112). By becoming myth, speech becomes pure form, its contingency is left behind and it is emptied of its history to become a second order signification (117). For Barthes, speech is naturalized and dehistoricized to become myth. In that sense, "the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated" (119). Within the JANM, the Japanese American subject is, paradoxically, stripped of its history while its agency across time and space is affirmed. Differences in this history are obscured and the relationship between Japanese and American brought together in the hyphenated name is naturalized.

to form a picture of what the life of Japanese Americans *was* like. A large glass gallery exhibits common items associated with the first generation of Japanese in America (commonly called Issei). A breadbox from the Yasui Brothers Bread Company, a bentobako lunch box from Japanese workers, and a baseball mitt are some of the items captioned according to their donors and displayed in this case. This display of artifacts and time-line chronology of immigration proceeds linearly until there is a sharp left turn into the *Looking Like the Enemy* and *Community Voices* exhibits which discuss the internment period.[8] Rather than examine the plethora of everyday items presented in these galleries, to get a better idea of the hybrid subjectivity created by the Museum I wish to explore the people that are displayed in these exhibits. In this regard, one dominant presence and three absences come to "inhabit" the museum space.

Despite the absence of bodies in the Army barracks, there are a lot of bodies re-presented in the *Common Ground* exhibit. The four galleries and seven exhibits contained in those present many photographs and even a couple of films all shot by

[8] These two exhibits make up the *Community in Wartime* gallery which is characterized by large panels of text explaining the World War II period.

Americans of Japanese descent to show the actual people that lived during this time. Most of these images mark events such as the arrival of people with luggage during the start of relocation, the departure of young Japanese American men as troops to go to war in Europe, film sequences of the high school dance, or class photographs from the Japanese Methodist Episcopal Mission in Bakersfield. Given the number of these images it is a little surprising that there are almost no adult interned subjects presented. Most of the pictures of life during internment exclude adults and focus on children or youths.

The most prominent figures are those of young girls at times simply presented as objects to admire, at times doing different activities such as learning to dance or type. In fact, the symbol for the entire *Common Ground* exhibit is the circa 1918 photograph of "A daughter of Japanese immigrants holds her country's flag," discussed at the beginning. This photograph is made larger and displayed behind *Moving Walls* at the entrance to *Becoming Japanese American.* It is also reproduced on the pamphlets and handouts that museum visitors are given to interact with *Common Ground.* This little girl is the dominant presence in the *Common Ground* exhibit. In the *Family Activity Guide* she

becomes the bullet icon used to separate different activities. In its discussion of *Moving Walls* the *Family Activity Guide* even places her image right outside the door of an external view of a connect-the-dots Army barracks.

As I commented above, the photograph's meaning for the viewer is defined by the intersection of two codes of connotation: the Asian face and the American flag. The Museum's deployment of the combination of those two meaning systems in the image constructs the notion of racial purity and cultural hybridity that inaugurates a Japanese American subject. Her image, after all, is literally beside a sign that reads, "Becoming Japanese American." That statement may caption the text more than its original production date and title.

Even though this picture is dated as circa 1918, the image circulates throughout the whole of the museum. As the *Family Activity Guide* demonstrates, the image of the girl is lifted from her specific time and place, which is never exactly given, and she floats into all of the other exhibits. Thus her juxtaposed identity becomes important when examining the *Community in Wartime* exhibits even though the picture was taken twenty years before

World War II. She becomes the dominant presence, and she fills up the museum so much that two absences are worth noting.

In examining who is placed into the barracks of *Moving Walls* it is worthy to note who is not included or what identities are downplayed. First, the battered body of abuse is downplayed and excluded from the exhibit. Although there were four incidences of shootings during the internment period there is relatively little discussion of abuse, torture, or murder at the hands of Army soldiers.[9] Even though there is a section of *Community Voices* which details one of the shootings it is only described by text, there are no photographs, and relatively little discussion of the event in the other cases. This seems peculiar because this level of racism would surely be noteworthy in recording the history of internment. However, a battered and dead body not be able to signify a "survivor" of internment who thrives today. Also, in calling attention to these shootings, *Common Ground* would construct an image of the oppressive American soldier who fires the shot. The specific identity of this soldier or any soldier is left out of the story

[9] According to the Miller report *Personal Justice Denied*, four cases of shooting were recorded by the War Relocation Authority, they occurred at Manzanar, Tule Lake, Gila River, and Topaz (175-6).

told here.[10] In other words, although American society is criticized as racist, very few specific individuals are identified as harming Americans of Japanese descent. The implication of this, however, is that the exhibit must construct some other system of abuse and hardship to symbolize the violence of exile. What comes to stand in for this trauma of relocation is the harsh desert conditions.

Here the museum fills in *Moving Walls* not with people but with dirt. The dirt of the desert that is unproductive and painful as it is blown in through the gaps in the *Moving Walls* barracks. The barracks construction lends itself to this filling in by the environment. The gaps in the walls and bare wooden boards almost let in more light than the bulbs hanging overhead and a broken window adds to the already "shoddy" construction of the standing residence. The Congressional Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians commented at length about the poor construction of the army barracks:

> Construction was of the kind used to house soldiers overseas—the so-called "theatre of operations" type, modified somewhat to accommodate women and children. The barracks were built of planks nailed to studs and covered with tarpaper. In some

[10] The obvious exception to this is the naming of the War Relocation Authority officials who oversaw the internment process. Names such as General Dewitt are given and they are clearly criticized for their racist stance.

> places the gree wood warped quickly, cracking walls and floors. Congressman Leland Ford said of the Manzanar barracks that "on dusty days, one might just as well be outside as inside." "So much of our work was done sloppily," Dean Meeker testified of Heart Mountain: I can remember the foreman's comment when he found cracks in the building. He said, 'Well, I guess those Japs will be stuffing their underwear in there to keep the wind out.'...No inside walls or ceilings were included in the original plans. (159)

As the museum visitor glances around the inside of the barracks they are likely to pose that familiar question asked when a realization of the gaps in construction and standard of living is established between themselves and the past, "How could they have lived in these conditions?"

The museum does not leave the emptiness of the gaps in the walls unfilled for long, it is filled in by the dirt of the internment camps. Although several minor references are made to the conditions of living in desert exile the clearest filling in of the barracks' gaps is done in *Relics from Camp*. *Relics from Camp* is an artist's installation piece depicting life in the camps. Created by Kristine Yuki Aono, it is a large glass box placed on the floor divided into twelve smaller boxes. Each one of the smaller boxes then represents one of the internment camps: from the top left to bottom right, Manzanar, Jerome, Poston, Amache, Heart

Mountain, empty case, Crystal City, Topaz, Gila River, Rowher, Minidoka, and Tule Lake. Each small case has actual dirt from each of the locations of the camps which the artist collected as well as several small everyday items some collected at the sites, such as some barbed wire, while some are donated items, such as a Tule Lake baseball jersey. Although the case has twelve boxes, there were only ten internment camps. This is remedied by the inclusion of Crystal City, a detention center, and one empty case. All of the items included are everyday things: dolls, a boy scout sash, a dance announcement, one black baby shoe, some barbed wire, a broken cup, a flyswatter, some shells, a small necklace, marbles, a broken syringe, a performance mask, and some school yearbooks. Notice the emphasis in the items pertaining to childhood and youth. Almost all of the items displayed are related to events of youth, such as a dance announcement or a boy scout sash, or games and play among youth, such as dolls, baseball memorabilia, and marbles. The empty case is filled with some soil and school yearbooks.[11]

[11] Unfortunately, no one in the museum knew where the soil in the unnamed case was from, nor were they clear on why Yuki Aono chose Crystal City among the other detention centers.

There are some visible differences in the soil from the different camps, but they all appear dry and dusty. It is loosely packed into all of the cases and it seems like if the tops of the boxes were not covered with glass it would blow all over the museum floor. The case itself is massive and visitors must stand on it, in effect walking on the dirt, in order to see all of the items in the case. It seems that *Relics from Camp* shows the museum visitor that dirt, dust and soil were a part of the everyday experience of the children who resided in the camps.

Recounted at length in the hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and the Internment of Civilians, desert conditions, more than anything else, are what the internees had to grapple with and what they overcame. The dust and wind almost anthropomorphizes the desert, giving it a will against the internees. Monica Sone's recollection of her first day at the Minidoka camp is representative of what thousands of internees experienced:

> [W]e were given a rousing welcome by a dust storm…We felt as if we were standing in a gigantic sand-mixing machine as the sixty mile gale lifted the loose earth up into the sky, obliterating everything. Sand filled our mouths and nostrils and stung our faces and hands like a thousand darting needles. Henry and Father pushed on ahead while Mother, Sumi and I followed, hanging onto their jackets, banging suitcases into each other. At last

> we staggered into our room, gasping and blinded. We sat on our suitcases to rest, peeling off our jackets and scarves. The window panes rattled madly, and the dust poured through the cracks like smoke. Now and then when the wind subsided, I saw other evacuees, hanging on to their suitcases, heads bent against the stinging dust. The wind whipped their scarves and towels from their heads and zipped them out of sight. (quoted in Miller 161).

And so the dust and dirt of the desert finds its way into everything. Seeping through the large cracks of the barrack walls, drifting into everything that is exile, including the stories told forty years later, and a museum constructed fifty years later. Given the absence of a racist figure or a battered body, the images of young girls such as the "daughter of immigrants" are exposed to harsh conditions in the discursive space of the museum. *Common Ground*, then, makes the environment stand-in for the societal racism that existed during the World War II internment period.

The Post-Redress Period: Senior Citizens and More Children

If the environment becomes a stand-in for America's racism during World War II, the JANM continues its tale by discussing the taming of that environment and the repositioning of Japanese American space in Los Angeles. The reclamation story of

the 1994 efforts of forty men and women to move the barracks from Wyoming to Los Angeles and the post-redress discussion of the Japanese American community provide the end-point of a progress narrative about this minority group. In a sense this is painfully obvious as visitors look at photographs of people taking down the very walls that the photographs themselves are hanging from.

The photographs are filled with two types of people: senior citizens and young adults (roughly high school age). In this "filling in," literally and figuratively since the photographs hang on the current barrack's walls, the Japanese Americans are in control of the environment. The photographs display action and agency in the desert. Both young and old, probably internment survivors, work together in the harsh environment and the fruit of their labor is already visible to the observer. In this sense, *Moving Walls* represents the ultimate victory for the Japanese American community. In the representation of the reclamation story, we see the hybrid subject, still marked physically as Japanese but working within the cultural environment of America, who is capable of going out into the dessert and who remains unharmed by the environmental (racist) conditions.

In addition to the reclamation story, *Common Ground* presents another narrative that adds to this hybrid figure. Remember that *Moving Walls* is not only entranceway, but also the exit point of the *Common Ground* galleries. After observing internment, museum visitors also see the *Re-Visioning Ourselves, Re-Visioning America* exhibit that discusses the rise of the Asian American movement and the Congressional reparations and Presidential apology for internment. Again several everyday artifacts are displayed within the museum, but the most dramatic is the last display before returning to *Moving Walls, What is the Future of the Japanese American Community?*. This final exhibit is "A dynamic multi-screen video presentation" that "challenges us to think about how communities change and grow over time. Our communities will continue to thrive only as long as we stay open to new possibilities and new visions" (*Common Ground*). This television sequence displays many different contemporary festivals and commemorations including a children's day event and a Japanese American marathon. Both the children's day event and the marathon have interviews with small children who discuss what a community means to them. Children remain the focus of the

exhibit and the children of the post-redress period are similar to the girl who begins the galleries' story.

In the post-redress/reclamation period, the Japanese American subject is either an internment survivor or, again, a young girl. However, this time they are able to go out into the harsh conditions of the environment and work together. It is in this way that the story of *forty* men and women become representative of the overall strength of the Japanese American community. Whereas property is lost in the internment period, during this time, property (in the form of the barrack itself) is reclaimed. In other words, the memory of the dirt and loss of property persists in the museum itself. Again, the societal imposition of racism is transferred to the environment, however, now, the patron can observe the hybrid subjects ability to get out and work in that environment, as the photographs of construction display in *Moving Walls*.

The Museum's Present: Architecture and Control

It is, however, without one speck of dirt within the museum walls that the shoddy construction of the barracks calls attention to the harsh environmental conditions of desert exile. It is worth

noting that from the barrack's present location in Los Angeles, soil and dirt are precisely what is not there. Within the museum's sanitized, climate-controlled environment, the gaps in the barrack's walls are present, but what is absent is the ever-flowing cascade of dirt. The modern absence of dirt remains despite the imagination of the walls being filled in by the *Relics from Camp*. The fact is that *Moving Walls* is empty because the dirt has been sealed up inside glass boxes *Moving Walls*, in a strange way, distances itself from the internment period and tells yet another story about the conditions and inhabitants of the current period. When the viewer imagines the harsh conditions that are called into being by the barrack's form, their very placement within the museum in present-day Los Angeles reminds the viewer that, "No(w), we don't live like that." No dirt is found here, now, even though it was everywhere then, there. In other words, progress is achieved, triumphantly in this case, because as *Moving Walls* itself testifies, the Japanese Americans lived on and returned to other inhabitable areas, such as Los Angeles.

Not only does the Museum represent the ability to leave the barracks after being interned, it also symbolizes the potential to return to exile and take what was previously forced upon them

(residence in exile) and move it to the center (of Little Tokyo and the JANM). In other words, *Moving Walls* is, metaphorically and literally, a story about moving from periphery to center and being able to fill that center with a place that can withstand the hardships of national trauma and remain an inhabitable, hospitable space.

The Pavilion building, which cost $45 million and was completed in 1999, gives the museum patron a rich contrast to compare the barren-ness of *Moving Walls'* barrack to. The building itself has contemporary architecture, fashioned from stone, steel, and glass. The architecture of the building was designed by Gyo Obata, and the landscaping which includes a "Japanese style" rock and water garden was designed by Robert Murase.[12] The JANM's press release on the completion of the Pavilion building says that:

> the Pavilion provides cutting edge technology and the planning flexibility that will allow the Museum to expand current programs and develop and create new programs for the next millennium Designed to create a strong new architectural image for the

[12] The press release describes the two in this way:

Exhibition space—More than 18,000 square feet of new exhibition space is provided in the Pavilion. Both sky-lighted and contemporary "white box" galleries without natural daylight are provided, providing variety and flexibility for exhibition installations. Complementing the galleries are an outdoor terrace and an orientation theater.

Stone and Water Garden—Designed by landscape designer Robert Murase, this garden provides a place for contemplation and reflection. It is anchored by the Museum Store and the Garden Cafe. ("Architectural Fact Sheet")

> Museum, the Pavilion respects and honors its past while looking to the future." ("Architectural Fact Sheet")

The strength of the modern Japanese American community is displayed in the form of the Museum itself. In contrast to the historical residence of the barracks whose wooden planks were surplus building materials put together "sloppily," the modern museum, "uses a rich vocabulary of exterior and interior building material to express the Japanese reverence for materials and craftsmanship, at the same time creating forms that are bold and contemporary and reflect in an abstract way the rich urban context. Time-honored materials such as stone and wood, are contrasted with state-of-the-art materials including high- performance glazing and perforated stainless steel" ("Architectural Fact Sheet").

The current installation of *Moving Walls* and *Common Ground* provide the conclusion to the narrative of the history of the Japanese American community. The placement within the walls of the JANM, a decidedly modern building in downtown Los Angeles, exerts control over the harsh environment that came to symbolize the racist tensions of American society.

Implications and Conclusions

Moving Walls stands as the paradoxically empty center of the Japanese American National Museum. It is the stripping of *Moving Walls* ornamentation and decoration that allows it to be a space inhabited in three very different time periods. First, it stands in the internment period when Japanese Americans had to reside and survive in harsh conditions. Second, it stands in the 1990s when political, economic, and social mobility allow the survivor to enter the harsh environment, reclaim what *was* integral to survival. Third, it stands in the view of the visitor, who recognizes its place within the "new" world of post-exile *inside* a museum designed to keep nature out. A transformation has, therefore, been achieved. The different Japanese American subjects are all linked through a common community. This "Community of Spirit" crosses over time and space. The barren walls and floor of *Moving Walls* is, therefore, filled in with people and different kinds of environmental conditions which create a Japanese American subject who was exposed to harsh circumstances but who was able to survive and who continues to build a community within multicultural America. The displacement of racism into the natural

conditions is finally dealt with by the boundaries created by the Museum's own "*Moving Walls*".

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